

July 24th, 2017

Committee On Oversight and Government Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

“Challenges to the Freedom of Speech on College Campuses”

Witness Testimony

It’s an honor to testify here before you today.

My name is Ben Shapiro. I’m editor-in-chief of The Daily Wire and host of “The Ben Shapiro Show” podcast. The reason I’m with you today is that I speak on dozens of college campuses each year, so I have first-hand experience with the anti-First Amendment activities taking place on some of our college campuses. I’ve encountered anti-free speech measures, administrative cowardice, and even physical violence on campuses ranging from California State University at Los Angeles to University of Wisconsin at Madison to Penn State University to University of California at Berkeley. And I’m not alone.

In order to understand what’s been going on at some of our college campuses, it’s necessary to explore the ideology that provides the impetus for protesters who violently obstruct events, pull fire alarms, assault professors and other students – and the impetus for administrators who all too often humor these protesters. Free speech is under assault because of a three-step argument made by the advocates and justifiers of violence.

Step 1: They say that the validity or invalidity of an argument can be judged solely by the ethnic, sexual, racial, or cultural identity of the person making the argument.

Step 2: They claim that those who say otherwise are engaging in verbal violence.

Step 3: They conclude that physical violence is justified in order to stop such verbal violence.

Let’s examine each of these steps in turn.

First, the philosophy of intersectionality. This philosophy now dominates college campuses as well as a large segment of today’s Democratic Party: it suggests that straight white Americans are inherently the beneficiaries of white privilege, and therefore cannot speak on certain policies, since they have not experienced what it’s like to be black or Hispanic or gay or a woman. This philosophy ranks the value of a view not based on the logic or merit of the view, but on the level of victimization in American society experienced by the person espousing the view. Therefore, if you’re an LGBT black

woman, your view of American society is automatically more valuable than that of a straight white male.

The next step in this logic is obvious: if a straight white male – or anybody else who ranks lower on the victimhood scale – says something contrary to the viewpoint of the higher-ranking intersectionality identity, that person has engaged in a “microaggression.” As NYU social psychologist Jonathan Haidt writes, “*Microaggressions* are small actions or word choices that seem on their face to have no malicious intent but that are thought of as a kind of violence nonetheless.”

You don’t have to actively say anything insulting to “microaggress” – someone merely needs to take offense. If you say, for example, that society ought to be color-blind, you are microaggressing certain identity groups who have been victimized by a non-color-blind society.

NOTE: Microaggressions, as the name suggests, are not merely insults – they’re aggressions. They are the equivalent of physical violence. Just two weeks ago, psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett of Northeastern University published an essay in *The New York Times* suggesting that words can be seen as physical violence – they cause stress, stress causes physical harm. Thus, Feldman suggested, “it’s reasonable, scientifically speaking,” to ban speech you don’t like at your school.

This is inane and dangerous.

That’s because it leads to the final logical step: words you don’t like deserve to be fought physically. When I spoke at California State University at Los Angeles, one professor threatened students who sponsored me by offering to fight them; he then posted a slogan on the door of his office, stating, “The best response to micro-aggression is macro-aggression.” As Haidt writes, “This is why the idea that speech is violence is so dangerous. It tells the members of a generation already beset by anxiety and depression that the world is a far more violent and threatening place than it really is. It tells them that words, ideas, and speakers can literally kill them. Even worse: At a time of rapidly rising political polarization in America, it helps a small subset of that generation justify political violence.”

Indeed, protesters all too often engage in physically violent disruption when they believe their identity group is under verbal attack by someone – usually conservative, but not always. Not only do some administrators look the other way – at Middlebury College and Cal State Los Angeles and Berkeley, actual crimes were committed, and almost nobody has been arrested – but they actively forbid events from moving forward, creating a heckler’s veto: the notion that if you’re physically violent enough, you can get administrators to kowtow to you by cancelling an event you disagree with altogether. All of this destroys free speech. But just as importantly, it turns students into snowflakes, craven and pathetic, looking for an excuse to be offended so they can earn points in the

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intersectional Olympics and then use those points as a club with which to beat opponents. A healthy nation requires an emotionally and intellectually vigorous population ready to engage in open debate. Shielding college students from opposing viewpoints makes them simultaneously weaker and more dangerous. We must fight that process at every step. That begins by acknowledging that whatever we think about America, we must agree on this fundamental principle: all of our views should be judged on their merits, not on the color or sex or sexual orientation of the speaker, and those views should never be banned on the grounds that they offend someone.

Thank you,

Ben Shapiro
Editor-in-Chief of The Daily Wire
Host of The Ben Shapiro Show